

The Work of the Spirit

Last week we explored what it means to be born again which is the sovereign work of God's Spirit who comes into our lives and causes a spiritual rebirth when we become alive or responsive to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts

In this module we will be looking at how

- 1. The Spirit works in saving us**
- 2. How the Spirit works in our lives**

The Spirit works in saving us

Lets start at how He saves us

John 16:8-14 (ESV) And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged

He saves us by conviction . The Spirit convicts us about the meaning and reality of these 3 things in our lives. Sin, Righteousness and Judgement.

a. The concept of Sin

The word for sin in the original language of the bible means "missing the mark," which means essentially living a life independent of God. Being made in the image of God naturally obligates us to live in a certain way in order to fulfil our purpose to reflect God to glorify him. Sin is therefore when we move away from that goal.

The Spirit convicts us that we deviated from our original design.

It's like the Waze app in handphones it charts the course to our destination and if we deviate, Waze immediately informs us and provides instructions for course correction

The Spirit not only lets us know when we have deviated but allows our souls to feel the consequent regret and emotional pain of sin which cannot happen unless a person spiritually reborn.

Now look at the passage again and you can see the most important aspect of sin is not only missing the mark in the way we live but refusing to believe in the son of God, Jesus Christ, who came into the world as the Saviour of the world.

While we were yet helpless sinners God provided His Son as a sacrifice for sin

It such a great act of love is provided to undeserving sinners as us the it is the enormous responsibility on our part to respond to this sacrifice and pledge our lives to Jesus.

Hence the ultimate sin is not what we usually think is sin which is murder, rape or robbery it is the act of rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice whom God had provided for us.

This idea of sin being the rejection of Jesus may remain an abstract concept in the mind of the unbeliever for years until the Holy Spirit comes in when the gospel is presented and then He convicts us of this sin in our lives.

b. True Righteousness

The second work of the Holy Spirit is the conviction of what true righteousness is and is not.

Firstly what true righteousness is

True righteousness comes two features

- a. From Jesus being offered as a sacrifice for our sins which is why He says ..you will no longer see me.
- b. From the fact that Jesus goes to the right hand of the Father which refers to the ultimate righteousness of Jesus as there can be no one more righteous than Jesus because there is no one who stands at the right hand of the Father.

So it is only in the death and resurrection of Jesus and his subsequent position at the right hand of God is the ultimate true source of righteousness and it is this that the Spirit convicts us of.

The Spirit also convicts us of what righteousness is not .

This is the man made righteousness and we often do this is by religious righteousness, secular righteousness or even by psychological righteousness.

Religious Righteousness:

During the time of Jesus, he had encountered lots of religious righteousness from the Pharisees at the time. Their righteousness was based on apparent compliance to the letter of the law, which they followed very closely in order to gain some semblance of righteousness.

Their righteousness consisted in carefully following the letter of the law but ignoring the spirit of the law.

When Jesus healed a lame man in John 5 which was an act of love, instead of thanking him the religious leaders went against Jesus because they were upset that Jesus had apparently broken the Sabbath law of prohibition against any kind of work. The intent of the Sabbath law was for the well-being of mankind in terms of rest from the work week to enjoy God hence the prohibition against work.

Jesus healing of the lame man was done in accordance to that principle for the well-being of man as there is no better well-being than complete healing of a man lame and suffering from birth.

In their zeal to construct a superficial righteousness based on just the outward conformity to the law the Pharisees completely misread the intent of law and broke the spirit of the law themselves with their cruel disregard for the well-being of the lame man. Such was the righteousness of man, superficial on the outside and inside devoid of any meaning.

The book of Isaiah confirms what God thinks about our righteous deeds,

Isaiah 64:5-6 (ESV) You meet him who joyfully works righteousness, those who remember you in your ways. Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved?6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

The actual original Hebrew actually says that our righteous deeds are like menstrual cloth, it is dirty, it is bloody, it is useless, it is not really righteous, it is not clean, it is dirty.

Here is another recent picture of religious righteousness. There was a school in India which was torched by religious mob, resulting in tragic death of 30 people. They burned the whole school down but they left the goddess of learning sitting outside completely untouched. They were religious to the letter because they were respectful enough to spare the goddess but at the same time thought nothing of killing dozens of innocent lives.

There was also a recent report on sexual abuse in institutions in Australia. As a result, there were 15,000 people who were actually interviewed by the commission and 2500 reports made to the police of sexual abuse. The report also detailed abuse in churches of other denominations besides Catholics, but they concluded that the greatest number of alleged abuse perpetrators were found in Catholic institutions. The commission concluded that 7% of priest who worked in Australia between 1950 and 2009 had been accused of child sexual abuse. Outwardly these priests wore the robes of holiness but inwardly they were religious predators. This is religious righteousness.

Secular Righteousness: Now aside from religious righteousness, we have secular moral righteousness.

You have often heard the phrase of how we should listen to our “better angels”

But we create our own better angels .. we make up our own rules as we go along.

How many of us have heard; I don't steal, I don't rob, I pay my taxes or most of it at least ...so I am a good guy. We have a particular sense of personal righteousness which we hold to and is the basis of our self-esteem.

We hear of the neighbour who left his wife and kids and ran off with his secretary and in our minds”there is a bad man, how cruel and unthinking and how immoral”.

That's not us, we are righteous.

Psychological Righteousness: Then there is today's psychologist who give you psychological righteousness. When you have done something wrong, they advise you to deny everything, the pain will go away, shift the blame to someone else preferably your spouse, accept yourself as you are or take credit for being at least being honest about your sin and take credit for that.

These are the ways in which we build our fig leaves, so that we could respect ourselves and feel that we can stand in front of God.

The Holy Spirit will come in and convict us that these religious, psychological and moral righteousness are actually quite useless and until the spirit breaks these barriers down, you will not be aware of your own sin.

c. Judgement

The last area where the Holy Spirit will convict us with regard to is actually in verse 11

11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged

Here the role of the Spirit is to convict us of the spiritual and eternal danger we are in. The final outcome will be judgment and hell because the ruler of this world Satan has already been judged and defeated by Christ on the cross and we will join Satan in his fate unless we repent.

The conviction of the Spirit regarding our sin the worthlessness of our own man made “righteousness” and the danger of eternal judgment serve the most important purpose in driving us to the need for Jesus

Assurance of Salvation

Once we have repented and come to Jesus the Spirit then works in comfort and reassurance in our hearts

Paul says in Ephesians 1:13-14

*13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the **guarantee of our inheritance** until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

In ancient times the wax seal with imprint from the signet ring is the guarantee that the contents of the letter have been protected from tampering. The seal is the guarantee.

Adoption

Along with this sense of assurance the Spirit then makes us the adopted sons of God.

Romans 8:14-17 (ESV) For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

We are adopted, we are part of God’s family, we are part of God’s family, we are called the adopted sons. We have that kind of intimacy that allows us to call God, “Abba” which is the Hebrew equivalent of our own contemporary term of endearment like “Papa”

Let’s read on the same chapter,

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The work of the Holy Spirit is in adoption. It transforms us into God’s adopted children and the Spirit speaks to our spirits within us. It gives us the kind of quite assurance that we are children of God and we have a future as heirs of the Almighty king of the universe, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Let’s revise how the Spirit works in salvation

1. The Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness and judgment
2. The Spirit is our guarantee of salvation
3. The Spirit makes us adopted “sons” of God and assures us we are heirs

How the Spirit works in our lives

Next let us look at how the Spirit lives and works in our lives which is known as being filled with the Spirit

The Spirit works in our lives through the agency of God's Word

When we read the Word of God the Spirit enables us to respond appropriately to the Spirit. We will find that there are greater and greater portions of our lives coming under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. Our yielding to the Holy Spirit's influence is not unlike responding to a friend who advises us and exerts greater and greater influence over how we think and act. When this happens, we are progressively transformed into the image of God, which means we show the change

in godly character which is the fruit of spirit like love, joy and peace. In our behavior, we become more God like in ethical integrity and with goodness. When we receive guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are endowed with assurance and boldness, we have the gifts of the Spirit and the Spirit unites us to everyone else in the body of Christ. This is how the Holy Spirit works in the life of a disciple.

The vital question in our study today is how do I become filled with the Holy Spirit?

First thing we find to know that being filled with the Holy Spirit is not an optional extra. We are actually commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit..

The filling of the Holy Spirit is a dual tract process, one which we can see on the outside of disciple's life and on the other one is what happens inside. On the inside of us in our spiritual life, the Spirit prompts us and gives us the power. Outwardly the Spirit's influence is seen in our attitude and decision making that leads to action.

How do we become filled with the Holy Spirit?

To answer this question Paul writes almost two identical letters; one to the Ephesians and one to the Colossians. When we put these two passages side by side, we get some understanding of what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18-21 (ESV) And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Parallel passage in Colossians

Colossians 3:16 (ESV) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God

You can see there is a parallel here. Being filled with the spirit in the Book of Ephesians is the same as letting the word of God dwell in you richly in the book of Colossians.

In the Book of Ephesians, Paul uses the imagery of wine drinking. He says, don't get drunk with wine for that is debauchery, instead be filled with the spirit. Getting drunk with wine, being controlled by wine, is analogous to being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Hence just as we love to be so thrilled of the high and influence of alcohol in a similar way we should instead be filled or be under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Now look at the parallel passage in Colossians encourages us to "let the Word dwell in us richly"

The result of being filled with the spirit or letting God's word dwell richly in our lives are the same in both passages. In Ephesians it says

Ephesians 5:19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always

This happens when you are filled with the spirit. Colossians says

Colossians 3:16 ...teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God

Similar parallel passage with the same results but that occurs by allowing the word of God to saturate our lives.

Hence what it means is that being filled with the Spirit is letting the Word of God saturate our lives, change our attitudes.

So let's summarize again.

Being filled with the spirit of God is the same thing as letting the word of God dwell richly in our lives. Letting the word of God control, saturate and guide us. Hence this is what the Holy Spirit filling is like. On the inside, He fills, influences our lives in a continuous recurrent process. On the outside, it is reading and trusting God's word. The more we read and trust God's word, the more we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Another way of describing the filling of Holy Spirit is setting our minds. It is a mindset.

Romans 8:5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

Paul is saying that there are only two ways to live you either live by setting your mind , making a decision, to focus on living and being guided by the Spirit by being obedient to God's Word or living according to our own whims and fancies which is what he means by the flesh.

Each decision has a consequence

Romans 8:6 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The decision you make to live as you like will result in spiritual death. That is a mindset hostile to God or an attitude that looks down on the things of God. This is the one that cannot please God

The Holy Spirit does not overrule us. He will need us to make up our minds to allow ourselves to be influenced by the Spirit or to reject his influence and live for ourselves

Two dramatically different ways to live two dramatically different results

In conclusion this is a dual parallel process. The Holy Spirit's filling and power for us is on the inside. On the outside is our attitude and decision making process which depends on us actively considering that we are dead to sin, actively seeking the things of heaven, setting our minds on the things of God rather than things of the world.

The result of doing that is that the Spirit will inwardly enable us to live godly lives.

What if we want to live by the Spirit's influence but we find it hard . As the saying goes the Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak?

Look at what Jesus is teaching his disciples just before he goes to the cross. This setting is the upper room, is few hours before he goes to the cross.

John 16:13-14 (ESV) When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

There are two things that are quite important in this passage. He will guide you in all the truth. The Holy Spirit tells us the truth about who God is and what spiritual reality is. He will glorify me, now that's an essential function of the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit is not unlike the flood lights on a building. You don't really see the flood lights where they are but what the lights do is that they highlight the beautiful architecture of this building. What you see is actually the building, all the way to the top, you don't actually see the flood lights. So that is what the Holy Spirit does. The Holy Spirit draws attention to Jesus, accentuates His beauty and magnificence so that it enthral, it captivates and inspires our hearts.

Hence, when the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, it makes the love of God so real that it overwhelms all rejection, poverty, difficulty in life because his love becomes more important than all those things. The Holy Spirit so glorifies the power of Jesus that it will overwhelm our fear, anxiety, weakness or struggle.

The Holy Spirit also glorifies Jesus by highlighting His grace, as grace is so wonderful that it overwhelms our feelings of condemnation, low self-esteem or feeling useless.

When we read the Bible, the Holy Spirit so impresses us that the wisdom of God is so great that it captivates our hearts, from a concept it becomes a reality that we actually believe. It conveys a sense of reality and resonance in our hearts when our minds grasp the Word. It begins to make sense, it changes our view of the world and life and makes all other worldly values that use to hold sway over us diminish.

The Holy Spirit so fills us with the joy of the Lord that comes with being filled with the Spirit and worship in church becomes so attractive that we rather be intoxicated with that than with wine.

When Jesus says the Spirit glorifies him, it means it takes concepts like the love of God, grace of God, the wisdom of God and the power of God and it converts those concepts to heartfelt realities that we really feel these things in our heart.

Ezekiel is an Old Testament prophet that prophesize about coming of the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (ESV) And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

So therefore, what he is telling Israel, a prophecy which was fulfilled when Jesus came and sent Holy Spirit, is that the Spirit will move the rebellious, insensitive hearts and they will have a soft heart, a heart which is pliable under the control and moving under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He puts the Holy Spirit within us and causes us to walk in his statues and his law. Being careful to obey my rules which means godly living, living according to the image of God. That happens naturally and within our own hearts. It is not by force or compulsion that He makes Jesus so wonderful, His rules and wisdom so great that they become heartfelt realities that we willingly submit to.

When it comes to the things of God, what we are usually confronted with is the painful choice of being obedient and living the kind of life that reflects the image of God or reject this and decide to go it alone under our own wisdom and power. If we decide on the former, we could either do it under the Old Covenant which is through human efforts to obey the Law motivated by the fear God or our desire for reward. This way is the way of human pride in our attempts to be religious or we could do it by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit.

Living under the influence of the Spirit is life under the New Covenant. The filling of Holy Spirit in our lives we motivates us to do the things of God, not because we have or we expect reward or we are fearful of God but that we do it because we are convinced of its value. The Holy Spirit comes in our lives and moves our hearts.

Jesus describes this in Matthew 13:45-46, when it says

*Matthew 13:44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in **his joy** he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.*

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The kingdom of God is like someone who he finds a hidden treasure of great value, so much so that he is willing to sell everything else in order to buy it, because he is convinced of its value. Notice he sells his stuff with joy...not reluctantly. So many believers are always lamenting the

things they have given up to follow Jesus because they are not convinced of the treasure they have in Jesus. People who see the true value in Jesus let go of their earthly treasures with joy. The Spirit enables us to see this value

So let's summarize what the filling of the Holy Spirit is

The Holy Spirit is an aid to us, very much like those new fangled mechanical exoskeletons. The Exoskeleton is something that we strap on to our limbs to give us extra power. With this device you can lift heavy weights and run twice as fast as you ever could under your own power. It gives you that ability, but you have got to make your own decisions. The device kicks in to power your legs when your legs actually move and starts to run to augment it. It doesn't do anything if you don't do anything. So when the Holy Spirit comes in, it comes in with the Word and you are motivated read the Word and when you read the word, the Holy Spirit uses that Word and it glorifies Jesus and makes Jesus look great because it puts the flood lights on Jesus. It inspires us, allows the Word to change our values, our attitude and love towards Jesus, so that glorifying Jesus becomes the most important thing in our hearts. The

Spirit changes our attitudes causing us to decide to set our minds to the things of God rather than things of the world. When that has happened, we then live out according to God's word and the Holy Spirit gives us the power to carry out these decisions. That's what it means by the filling of the Holy Spirit.

There are certainly many wrong concepts on how we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit. There are those who believe that if certain pastors lay their hands on you then suddenly the Spirit fills you up with power, much like your hand-phone is being charged up and you will feel great, so in love and close to God, you can speak in tongues perform miracles and live a victorious Christian life.

But this effect is often short lived and the person gets depressed again and has to come back again a week later having been depleted of the Spirit like our hand phones and we need to be recharged

This kind of understanding of the filling of the Spirit is not biblical and it totally ignores the agency of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God together, in a gradual lifelong process of where we step out in faith in response to the word of God and prayer in our lives. There is no quick fix solution, our struggle with sin is a lifelong journey and the Spirit is there to fill us and transform us when we regularly encounter the word and pray and set our minds to allowing the spirit to transform us.

REVISION:

We are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The combination of prayer and reading of the Word and obedience to the word is how we are to be filled or controlled by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus and so moves us to experience the reality of his love in our lives and this inspires us to decide and set our minds in living obedient holy lives.

The Spirit empowers us to live holy lives that please Him.

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean when John writes “ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment”
2. Can you share with the rest how you first became a Christian? Was there ever a sense of conviction of sin?
3. If a person becomes a Christian without a clear cut conviction of sin what do you think there is a danger of?
4. Look at John 16:11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. Why is it important for the Spirit to convict us that the ruler of this world is already judged?
5. How do we seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
6. Why should we be filled with the Holy Spirit why can't we live our normal lives like before we became Christians.
7. What if you read the Word of God and still feel nothing in your life is there something wrong?
8. If I am filled with the Spirit shouldn't I be able to speak in tongues?
9. What if I continue to live a sinful life because I still enjoy my old life of lust and greed because I just cannot feel that living a godly life is an attractive option for me. I love my sin too much?
10. How do I know if I am filled with the Holy Spirit?
11. Is the presence of power or miraculous spiritual gifts any indication that I am living a Spirit filled life? Matt 7:22